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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DEPARTURE OF DR HILDA MOLINA

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) As has been reported widely in the media, dissident Cuban doctor Hilda Molina departed Cuba late on Saturday, June 13, and traveled to Buenos Aires to be with her seriously ill mother. Demonstrating that it can move very quickly when it wants to, the GOC provided Molina a passport and exit visa on Friday June 16. She then received a visa from the Argentine embassy and confirmed her travel plans later on the same day. Polchief spoke with Dr Molina as she was heading to the airport on Saturday. She said she did not know how long she would be gone, but implied that it was possible she would not return. Her fairly consistent position for some time had been that she only wanted permission to travel to Argentina temporarily in order to visit her family and get to know her grandchildren. When her mother became critically ill about two weeks ago, almost precisely on the anniversary of her departure from Cuba, Molina told us she wanted to go to Argentina urgently to care for her and bring her back to Cuba if possible.

¶2. (C) Molina told polchief that the Cuban conference of Catholic bishops had been instrumental in convincing the GOC to grant her permission to leave. She expressed appreciation to the Argentine embassy for moving quickly with her visa, but said that they too had been surprised by the GOC move. Molina told polchief the church wanted to remain as far in the background as possible and was quite content to have the Argentine government take all the credit.

¶3. (C) On June 10, polchief had spoken with the DCM of the nunciatura (the former nuncio has departed and not yet been replaced) and a representative of the bishop's conference on Molina's behalf, and was told that the issue was being worked actively. When he passed this information to Dr Molina she had said she appreciated the effort the church was making, but that she had little hope they could achieve anything in time, since her 90-year old mother was suffering multiple organ failure and seemed to be fading quickly. She also noted that she did not have a passport and had not even begun the process of obtaining an exit permit (tarjeta blanca), both of which could take months to obtain under normal circumstances, even if the government did not interpose any objections.

¶4. (C) Reaction to Molina's departure among Cuban dissidents has been positive if cautious. Members of the Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White) told polchief on Sunday that, while they were happy for Molina personally, they believed the GOC had taken the action simply to influence EU members who would be meeting on June 15 to review the status of the EU common position on Cuba. They feared that the plight of their family members held in prison would be ignored in the wake of the good news about Molina's travel. Other dissidents said much the same in statements published on June 15.

15. (C) COMMENT: We at USINT are also happy to see Molina, with whom we have had close contact for several years, be able to visit her family and see her ailing mother again. We are not sure what prompted the GOC to grant her permission to leave, but certainly would not discount the idea that the decision was an attempt to influence the EU. Likewise, though it appears that the Argentine government was not directly involved, the GOC may have judged that releasing Molina now would benefit President Cristina Fernandez on the eve of local elections. We also are glad to see the local church taking a more proactive role. If it can stay out of the limelight in this affair, the church may begin to employ some quiet diplomacy with the GOC to assist in ameliorating some of Cuba's more egregious human rights violations.  
FARRAR